

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 10769

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, KS

SUBJECT: KOREAN POLITICAL SCENE: SIGNS OF A THAW?

REF: SEOUL 10672 (DTG 190919Z DEC 77)

SUMMARY: AS YEAR'S END APPROACHES, SOME IMPROVEMENTS ARE VISIBLE IN KOREAN INTERNAL POLITICS -- NOTABLY TRANSFER OF KIM TAE-JUNG FROM PRISON TO SNU HOSPITAL AND RUMORS OF FURTHER RELEASES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. THERE ARE A FEW CONTRA-INDICATIONS, HOWEVER. END SUMMARY.

1. AS 1977 DRAWS TO A CLOSE, THERE ARE SEVERAL SIGNS OF A THAW ON THE KOREAN DOMESTIC SCENE.

A) ITEM: TONGA ILBO REPORTED DECEMBER 19 THAT, ON DECEMBER 12, GOVERNMENT HAS ISSUED PASSPORTS TO TWO RATHER UNUSUAL APPLICANTS: KIM CH'OL, FORMER HEAD, UNIFIED SOCIALIST PARTY (TO ATTEND THE TOKYO CONFERENCE OF SOCIALIST PARTIES) AND BISHOP CHI HAK-SUN (TO VISIT EUROPE AND THE VATICAN). THIS IS THE MORE UNUSUAL IN THAT BISHOP CHI IS STILL UNDER
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SUSPENDED SENTENCE FOR A VIOLATION OF EM-4. ASKED FOR COMMENT, ONE UNIDENTIFIED OPPOSITION NATIONAL ASSEMBLYMAN NOTED "SIGNS OF A THAW IN OUR POLITICAL SITUATION ALSO, LIKE THE PRAGUE SPRING," ACCORDING TO THE TONGA'S POLITICAL GOSSIP COLUMN.

B) ITEM: THE BIG NEWS FOR THE OPPOSITION THIS WEEK, IF

NOT THIS YEAR, IS THE TRANSFER ON DECEMBER 19 OF KIM TAE-JUNG FROM PRISON IN CHINJU TO SEOUL NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, OSTENSIBLY SOLELY FOR ADEQUATE TREATMENT OF HIS RHEUMATISM. ALTHOUGH LEGAL STATUS OF KIM'S INCARCERATION IS TECHNICALLY UNCHANGED, ACTUAL CONDITIONS OF HIS CONFINEMENT HAVE IMPROVED. ONE OF HIS SECRETARIES TOLD EMBOFF THAT MRS. KIM IS ALLOWED TO CARE FOR HER HUSBAND FOR TWO HOURS EVERY DAY, EACH OF HIS LAWYERS MAY VISIT HIM ONCE EVERY DAY, AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY MAY VISIT ONCE A WEEK (BUT NO OTHERS ARE ALLOWED TO CALL). HOWEVER, ONE GUARD REMAINS IN HIS ROOM AT ALL TIMES, AND AT LEAST FOUR MORE ARE AVAILABLE IN A ROOM ACROSS THE HALL. KIM'S FAMILY REPORTEDLY RELEASED A STATEMENT DECEMBER 20 COMPLAINING OF SOME OF THESE CONDITIONS AND QUOTING KIM AS SAYING HE WOULD RATHER BE BACK IN CHINJU PRISON. WHEN IN CHINJU PRISON, HOWEVER, KIM WAS ONLY ALLOWED ONE VISIT PER MONTH BY HIS WIFE AND ONE BY HIS LAWYER, NO OTHER VISITS WERE PERMITTED.

C) ITEM: AT LEAST TWO SOURCES HAVE TOLD EMBOFF THAT THIRTY TO FORTY VIOLATORS OF EM-9 WILL BE RELEASED FROM JAIL ON DECEMBER 23. OTHER SOURCES ARE NOT AS SPECIFIC, SAYING RELEASES WILL BE BEFORE END OF YEAR. SOME OF THOSE ON LIST - WHICH IS SAID TO INCLUDE MYONGDONG DEFENDANTS, MINISTERS, PRIESTS, COLLEGE STUDENTS, AND LESS PROMINENT POLITICIANS - ARE SAID TO HAVE SIGNED CONFIDENTIAL

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STATEMENTS OF REPENTENCE, OR MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILY HAVE SIGNED FOR THEM; OTHERS ARE SAID TO BE THE BENEFICIARIES OF A JOINT GUARANTEE BY BISHOP CHI, REV. PAK HYONG-GYU, AND REV. AN PYONG-MU.

2. THERE ARE, AS ALWAYS, SOME NEGATIVE SIGNS PRESENT AS WELL. KNCC SECRETARY GENERAL KIM KWAN-SUK, WHO HAS BEEN A CENTRAL FIGURE IN MOVES TO FREE THE POLITICAL PRISONERS BUT IS NOT A DIRECT PARTICIPANT IN THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS, IS TAKING A GUARDED POSITION ON THE POSSIBILITY OF RELEASES TAKING PLACE THIS YEAR.

3. COMMENT: AS WE READ THE MOOD, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT SOME RELEASES WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. POSSIBILITY REMAINS, HOWEVER, THAT UNFORSEEN EVENTS WILL CAUSE FURTHER DELAYS, WE ARE ENCOURAGED AT THIS TIME, HOWEVER, BY THE EXPECTED TIMING. WITH ITS "NATURAL" FLAIR FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS, THE ROKG COULD BE EXPECTED TO MAKE A MAJOR RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AT A TIME WHEN REPORTS OF ITS ACTIONS WOULD BE SMOTHERED IN THE JINGLE BELLS OF CHRISTMAS.
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